THE NATIONAL CENTER ON Parent, Family, and Community Engagement

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS:

Guide to Developing Relationships with Families

POSITIVE GOAL-ORIENTED RELATIONSHIPS

Explore the role that Positive Goal-Oriented Relationships play in effective parent, family, and community engagement. This guide offers definitions, tools, and guides for reflective practice and supervision.

This resource is intended for the entire Head Start and Early Head Start community and professionals in the early childhood field. Individuals, groups of staff, and supervisors can use this tool as part of training and reflective practice and supervision. This resource is aligned with the Office of Head Start (OHS) Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework and Head Start Performance Standards (HSPS).

1. **Definitions**
   Learn about family engagement and positive goal-oriented relationships.

2. **Tools**
   Explore tools to develop strength-based attitudes and relationship-based practices.

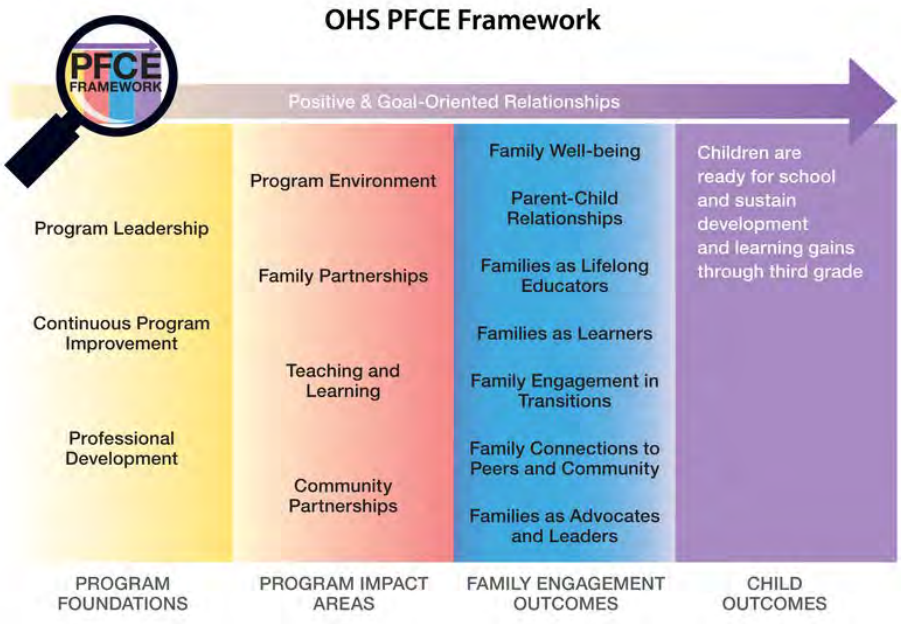
3. **Reflective Strategies**
   Discover reflective practice and supervision strategies.

4. **Additional Resources**
   Find more resources on family engagement and related topics.

1. DEFINITIONS

Family Engagement and Positive Goal-Oriented Relationships

The Office of Head Start (OHS) Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework is a road map for progress. It is a research-based approach to program change designed to help Head Start and Early Head Start programs achieve outcomes that lead to positive and enduring change for children and families. When parent and family engagement activities are systemic and integrated across PFCE Framework Program Foundations and Program Impact Areas, better family outcomes are achieved. This leads to children who are healthy and ready for school. Parent and family engagement activities are grounded in positive, ongoing, and goal-oriented relationships with families.



What are Positive Goal-Oriented Relationships?

The goal of parent and family engagement is to build strong and effective partnerships with families that can help children and families thrive. These partnerships are grounded in positive, ongoing, and goal-oriented relationships with families. **Positive Goal-Oriented Relationships** are based on mutual respect and trust and are developed over time, through a series of interactions between staff and families. Successful relationships focus on families' strengths and a shared commitment to the child's well-being and success. As relationships between staff and families are strengthened, mutually respectful partnerships are built. Strong partnerships with families contribute to positive and lasting change for families and children.

Why Do Positive Goal-Oriented Relationships Matter?

Positive Goal-Oriented Relationships support progress for children and families. These relationships contribute to positive parent-child relationships, a key predictor for success in children's early learning and healthy development. Through positive interactions with their most important caregivers, children develop skills for success in school and life. They learn how to manage their emotions and behaviors, solve problems, adjust to new situations, resolve conflicts, and prepare for healthy relationships with adults and peers.

Healthy relationships between parents and children develop through a series of interactions over time. Healthy relationships are primarily built on warm, positive interactions. There may also be brief disconnections or misunderstandings in relationships. For example, there will be times when parents and children are not perfectly in sync. A toddler may be laughing and playing with a parent and be surprised when her scream of delight is met with her mother's raised voice, telling her to be quieter. An older infant is enjoying his breakfast of rice cereal and is confronted by an unhappy face when he smashes the cereal into his grandmother's work clothes. These temporary disconnections are natural and necessary, and they build a child's capacity for resilience and conflict resolution. As long as interactions are primarily positive, children can learn important skills from the process of re-connecting.

Disconnections and challenges can occur in our relationships with families and colleagues as well. A father arrives to find his daughter happily splashing in rain puddles and is upset with the caregiver. He is in a hurry and doesn't have time to change her clothes. A mother is frustrated that her child is not making more progress and blames the caregivers. Imperfect interactions help us learn how to tolerate discomfort and how to resolve challenges. These are important skills for building strong partnerships.

Positive relationships between parents and providers are important as families make progress toward other goals, such as improved health and safety, increased financial stability, and enhanced leadership skills. Strong partnerships can provide a safe place where families may explore their hopes, share their challenges, and let us know how we can help. Staff, community partners, and peers can be resources as families decide what is important to them and how to make it happen. Parents help us learn how to enhance their children's learning and healthy development. When we focus on families' strengths and view parents as partners, we can work more effectively to support parent-child relationships and other outcomes for families and children.

Everything we do is intended to give families the emotional and concrete supports they want and need to reach better outcomes. When a family makes progress, parents have more capacity to give to their children. For example, a family may be struggling financially and constantly worried about where their next meal will come from. The parent may be overwhelmed or embarrassed, unsure of how to ask for help. If the parent trusts the program or a staff member, the parent might share their distress and worry. The program can work with the parent to find and access food and nutrition resources in their community. As the family stabilizes, the parent might work with staff to identify how to improve the situation in the long

term. The parent may decide to go back to school to increase his or her earning potential or might join a group to talk with other families about educational goals. The parent might work with the program and peers to find and access educational resources. As families take steps to reach their goals, they can engage in relationships with their children that prepare children for success in school and in life.

Recognizing What Families, Staff, and Children Contribute

Building a relationship is a dynamic and ongoing process that depends on contributions from families, program staff, and children. Families have a set of beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives that affect relationships with staff. Likewise, we as providers have a set of beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives, both personal and professional, which affect our relationships with families. Children also bring unique contributions to relationships. They live and learn in a unique environment and are influenced by their parents, families, and other adults and peers in their lives. Children bring their behavior, temperament, emotion, and developmental stage to their interactions with family members and staff.

Understanding and Appreciating Differences

Successful partnerships are created when families and staff value the perspective and contributions of one another and care about a shared goal and positive outcome. Programs can partner with parents to understand the child's and family's strengths, goals, interests, and challenges. In each interaction we can learn more about each other and about ourselves as professionals. When we understand and appreciate the perspective of the family, we are more likely to create successful partnerships. We let go of our own agenda and create a shared agenda with the family. We often refer to this as "meeting families where they are."

Meeting Families Where They Are: Cultural Perspectives

Understanding cultural beliefs and priorities is key to building relationships with families and is part of meeting families where they are. Each family comes to Head Start and Early Head Start with unique cultures that give meaning and direction to their lives. Culture is complex and is influenced by family traditions, country of origin, ethnic identity, cultural group, community norms, experiences, and home language. Cultural beliefs of individual family members and the entire family affect caregiving behaviors and inform decisions made about the child and the family. Culture affects our views on about key issues such as education, family roles, child-rearing practices, what constitutes school readiness, and how children should behave. Reflecting on the family's perspectives and learning more about them can help us think about how their cultural beliefs and values influence their choices and goals. In addition, we need to fully understand our own perspective and how our own experiences, biases, and cultures affect our perspective.

The ways that cultural beliefs affect relationship-building can be obvious or subtle. Regardless, cultural perspectives inform the choices families and professionals make. Some examples of the decisions and child-rearing practices that can be influenced by culture are:

- Communication. *How do the parents want their child to address a teacher, grandparent, doctor, or neighbor? Is saying 'hello' important when meeting someone new? Is eye contact a sign of respect or disrespect?*

- Role of Professionals. *Is it acceptable to disagree with their child's teacher? Are there areas of development and behavior that are seen as solely the responsibility of the professionals? Of the family?*

- Caregiving (Sleeping, Eating, Toileting). *Will a child sleep alone or with her parents? Will she be breast-fed or bottle-fed when she is an infant? Will she be expected to use a spoon to eat her food or will she be encouraged to eat with her hands? When will she be expected to start using the toilet?*

- Discipline. *How will he be disciplined if he is in danger? What if he bites a friend? What if he throws a temper tantrum at the park? Are there specific discipline strategies that parents think are more or less effective?*

- Language. *Is there a home language that is important to the family? Do they want her to only speak English at school and speak the home language with family? Are there important cultural traditions that rely on an understanding of a home language?*

- Learning. *Does the family see themselves as important teachers or is learning something that only teachers are responsible for? What kind of activities does the family like to do at home? Is there a certain age when the family expects him to be reading? Where does a child learn?*

Culture is real and important, but understanding it is not necessarily simple or easy. It takes patience, commitment, and a willingness to feel uncomfortable at times. It also takes courage and humility to look at our assumptions and biases and see how they affect our attitudes towards families. Our goals, insights, and experiences guide the choices we make as we build our relationships. Leadership and staff can make this a priority by dedicating professional development activities, including reflective practice and reflective supervision, to understanding how culture and language affects partnerships with families. Everyone benefits when we learn from families and bring new ideas and skills to our work.

Respectful partnerships are created when families and staff care about a shared and positive outcomes, and value the perspective and contributions of one another.

2. TOOLS

Strength-Based Attitudes and Relationship-Based Practices

We all know how important families are in the lives of their children. When we have strong relationships with families, we are helping to promote positive learning outcomes and healthy child development. Having strong relationships with families also makes it easier to have conversations involving uncomfortable feelings or challenging topics. In this section, we will explore tools (attitudes and practices) that we know work well when building relationships with families.

Strength-Based Attitudes for Building Positive, Goal-Oriented Relationships

An attitude is a way of thinking or feeling about someone or something that is often reflected in a person's behavior. Our attitudes create a frame of mind that shapes how we behave in our personal and professional life. Attitudes are shaped by experiences, beliefs, and assumptions. When we begin our interactions with positive attitudes, we tend to see families in a more positive light, giving us a strong foundation to build our partnership. In contrast, when we approach our interactions with negative attitudes, we are more likely to see fault, make negative judgments, and expect a negative outcome. Adopting a positive attitude does not mean avoiding challenges and only talking about positive observations and ideas. Instead, it is adopting a frame of mind that begins with a family's strengths. We begin with strength-based attitudes to express our belief that all families can make progress and that we are ready to strive for better outcomes together.

Strength-Based Attitudes	Sample Interactions Reflecting these Attitudes
Families are the first and most important teachers of their children. Families are our partners with a critical role in their family's development. Families have expertise about their child and their family. Families' contributions are important and valuable.	**Intake Meeting** • Tell me how you think your child learns best. How can you tell when he is really interested in something? • What ideas do you have for what we can do to best support her when she is here? • What do you do to comfort her when she is upset? **Follow-up during Informal Discussion** • You mentioned that she's a smart girl. Can you tell me more about that? **Home Visit** • You know him best. What do you imagine it will be like for him when he's in the program with other children? • Tell me what you would like for us to know about Julio. **Challenging Behavior** • Tell us what has worked at home when you have seen this behavior. **Within an Established Relationship** • Can you tell me about your hopes for yourself and your family? • What are your wishes and dreams for your family?

Your Reflections

Reflect on a time when you used a strength-based attitude with a family. Which attitude did you use? What did you say or do that reflected that attitude?

Reflect on a time when a strength-based attitude would have helped you build a relationship with a family. Which attitude would have been useful? What could you have said or done to reflect that attitude? How might the outcome have been different if you had used this attitude?

Relationship-Based Practices for Family Engagement

1. Observe and Describe the Child's Behavior to Open Communication with the Family	
Description	**Actions**
The child is the common focus for families and programs. When staff ask for parents' observations of a child's behavior and share their own, they create opportunities for discussion. Simple, clear descriptions of a child's behavior, without interpretations or judgments, give families and staff the chance to make meaning of that behavior together. This creates a starting point for discussion that can help identify common ground and differences. This strategy invites families to guide the conversation about their child. Often families react and respond to the program's ideas or agenda. This practice gives families the space to volunteer and share what they see, know, and want for their child.	• Share positive, genuine, and specific information about the child with the family. • Recognize the child's strengths and share them with the family. • Use simple, clear, and objective descriptions of the child's behavior. • Ask for a parent's observations and listen to what they think these mean about their child. • Begin challenging conversations by asking parents about what they see, behaviors that concern them, and what they think these may mean. It's important to know what kind of meaning parents make of their child's behavior. Then, share a description of what you see and give parents a chance to join with their ideas. • Wait before asking a lot of questions. Instead, start with a description of the child's behavior or a specific situation from the day. Leave time for the parent to share their ideas rather than be guided by a specific question based on your own agenda. Instead of sharing your own interpretation, listen to how the parent makes meaning of the behavior.
Examples	
"You and your child are always ready when the bus arrives. We really appreciate that." "I saw that he looked at you and grabbed onto your shirt as I came into the house." "I've been watching him explore with paint and getting used to the different brushes. He also tells stories about his paintings. You told me you want him to paint more realistic paintings. I wonder if he'll begin to do that once his painting skills catch up to his ideas. He is really sticking with it, and he loves it! I think we both want to help him work toward the same goal." "I notice that she often pats other children when they are crying." "I notice that every time you begin a conversation with me, he begins to tug at your arm."	

Your Reflections
Reflect on a time when you used this practice with a family. What did you say or do? *Reflect on a time when this practice would have helped you build a relationship with a family. What would you have said or done?*

2. Reflect on the Family's Perspective	
Description	**Actions**
Families share their children and themselves with us. They trust us with their hopes, dreams, fears, and challenges. We can work toward strong partnerships by showing genuine interest in families – their goals, values, and what they want for their family. Listening to their perspectives helps us gain a better understanding of the child and the family, and deepens our relationship with them. Information can flow in both directions, and both the staff and the family benefit from the mutual respect that results from taking the time to consider the other's perspectives. This practice is particularly useful when cultural differences in child-rearing and family roles emerge. Issues like education, discipline, social behavior, and even the goals of learning vary a great deal in a multicultural society. All families bring their beliefs and values to discussions about their child. A genuine partnership with families requires that we listen and pay attention to their perspectives.	• Invite parents to share their perspectives on their child's behavior and development. • Use parent observations and interpretations to inform how to foster the child's healthy development. • Before sharing data about a child, consider why you think the information is important and whether it will be important to the child's family in the same ways. • Ask families if there is anything in particular they want to share about their family. Invite families to share insights about their child. Partner with families to set goals and make decisions. • Ask family members what they would like to know and what they would like to share with you.

Examples
"I wanted to talk with you about your child's progress in learning to get along with the other kids. I've seen a lot of changes. I wondered what you've been thinking about this." "I noticed you have been working hard to make arrangements to see your family. It's important to you to spend time with your family during the holidays." "She is working so hard to learn to do things by herself. This morning she wanted to put her coat on all by herself. She got very frustrated and started to cry. I wanted her to be successful and I needed to go outside to help supervise the other children. She was very determined. I want to learn from you about what you do at home if you see her struggling so that we can help her with this together. What do you do?" "Last month you mentioned that you were going to learn more about the community center in your neighborhood. I'm curious if you found any programs that your family is interested in." "I wanted to follow up with you on our conversation about toilet training last week. Can you tell me how you think it's going for him?"
Your Reflections
Reflect on a time when you used this practice with a family. What did you say or do? *Reflect on a time when this practice would have helped you build a relationship with a family. What would you have said or done?*

3. Support Competence	
Description	**Actions**
This practice focuses us on recognizing and celebrating the family's successes, progress, and efforts in accomplishing their goals for their child and themselves. We share in their success, encourage them to recognize their competence, and join with them as they aspire to new goals. Sometimes because of our training, we think we know best and want to show or teach families how to do things better. We need to be careful not to interfere with their sense of competence by suggesting that we know more about their family than they do. We have expertise to share but we want to choose the right time to share our ideas and suggestions. Follow their lead. Ask if they want feedback or suggestions before jumping in with advice. This strategy reminds us to embrace the strengths of the cultures and home languages of families. We can tailor social and educational opportunities to build on each family's individual strengths and interests. Invite parents to share their language with children, staff, and families by teaching a song or sharing a story.	• Recognize and acknowledge family strengths. • Celebrate each step taken towards a goal as progress. • Help families identify and access personal and community resources. • Attribute child's progress to the parents' efforts whenever possible. • Build on parents' understanding with new ways to look at the child's behavior. • Wait until you establish a relationship with a family, or until they ask, to share your expertise and knowledge. • Ask them for ideas about how your program can help them achieve their goals for their family.

Examples
"You are doing a great job navigating the bus system to get Teegan to school. Would you be willing to share with other parents how you have been able to do that?" "I noticed that while we were talking, José and Leila worked together to separate the crayons and markers into piles by color. Look, they separated them into four piles - blue, yellow, green, and red. I remember when they started at the program it was important to you that they be successful in math and science. You must have been working on sorting things with them at home." "I noticed David gave a make believe cupcake to another little boy today who was sad because he had fallen and scraped his knee. It reminded me of when you brought me flowers when I had been out sick. You both are so thoughtful of others." "Last time we met you said you wanted to get your General Educational Development (GED) and we came up with some ideas for making that happen. Your husband mentioned that you seemed excited about these ideas. Is there anything I can do to support you in your progress?"
Your Reflections
Reflect on a time when you used this practice with a family. What did you say or do? *Reflect on a time when this practice would have helped you build a relationship with a family. What would you have said or done?*

4. Focus on the Family-Child Relationship	
Description	**Actions**
Strong parent-child relationships link with positive learning and social outcomes for children. Staff efforts to strengthen these relationships can help. Parents need to know that their relationship with their child is valued and supported by program staff. Sometimes they worry that their child may feel closer to program staff than to them, or they may feel that program staff judge their relationship with the child. When you share observations of positive parent-child interactions, you provide reassurance that the relationship between them and their child is the most important. When you tie families' efforts to make progress in their lives to the positive effect it has on their children, it reminds them how working toward their goals benefits the entire family.	• Share observations of parent-child interactions that demonstrate something positive about the relationship. • Share what you learned about the child from your observations of family-child interactions. • Welcome families to visit and volunteer in the classroom. • Talk with parents about the things you see them do and say that are responsive to their children's individual temperaments and that positively impact their development. • Acknowledge how a parent's goals positively affect the child's well-being, as all family goals ultimately do. • Discuss information in conferences that reinforces how much the family means to the child (e.g., pictures the child draws that include family members, acting as one of the family members in dramatic play, etc.).
Examples	
"I noticed when I arrived that Sam ran over to you and hugged your leg. I can see he is really connected to you." "I understand you are concerned that when you pick him up at the end of the day, he often seems upset or angry. I wonder if it is his way of saying how much he missed you all day. He manages his emotions all day and then gets to let go when he sees you. Maybe it's his way of saying how glad he is that you're back. " "Since you have been reading stories at bedtime together, he is spending more time with the books I bring on our home visits. Today he chose the book about dinosaurs. Would you like to borrow that book to read at bedtime this week?" "I think Jayda knows that this is important to you. She sees you going back to school, and it makes school that much more exciting for *her* because she wants to be like her mom."	

Your Reflections
Reflect on a time when you used this practice with a family. What did you say or do? *Reflect on time when this practice would have helped you build a relationship with a family. What would you have said or done?*

5. Value a Family's Passion	
Description	**Actions**
Emotions are always involved in raising children and working with a family. Whether they are celebrating a child's successes, worrying about how to pay bills, or showing anger at the child's behavior, we can expect that parents will have feelings about what is happening with their family. No matter how professional program staff are, emotions are also part of how we react to the families we work with in our programs. Rather than getting in the way of the work, try to understand that these emotions, both positive and negative, can be seen as parents' and staff's passionate concern for the family. Sometimes sharing emotions can be uncomfortable, but it is also a way to deepen the partnership with families. Even when parents and staff have very different ideas about what a family needs, they all want what is best for the family. When our shared goal is positive outcomes, families and staff can work together to determine how to resolve disagreements, share worries, and celebrate successes.	• Accept and acknowledge parents' emotions, both positive and negative. • Reframe parents' emotions as passion for their family. • Listen for what's behind the emotions and work with parents to understand them. • Genuinely acknowledge and accept these feelings. • Recognize and remember a family's passion from past conversations, and then build on it to provide focus when setting goals.

Examples
"It is so important to you that your child succeeds. All of these small successes with potty training don't seem enough when you are still facing wet laundry at the end of a long day. I want your child to succeed too, and we can work together to make sure it happens!" "Last time we talked you were very concerned that she is not learning the alphabet as quickly as the other children in her classroom. I wonder if you have thought more about that." "I can see that you're upset that the bus was late this morning. You've told us that it is important to you that he gets to school on time and that you can get to your class at the college on time." "I understand why you are upset about him getting bitten today. We're sorry he was hurt and want to reassure you that no skin was broken. We cleaned the area and put on a bandage. We gave him lots of hugs. We know his safety is the most important thing to you." "You certainly want what's best for Jayda. What about you? Are there things you would like to do?"
Your Reflections
Reflect on a time when you used this practice with a family. What did you say or do? *Reflect on time when this practice would have helped you build a relationship with a family. What would you have said or done?*

6. Reflect on Your Own Perspective	
Description	**Actions**
Both the family's perspectives and the staff's perspectives shape the conversation between families and staff. Our own perspectives include many elements—what we have been trained to do, what our agency wants from us, our feelings about working with children and families, and, most importantly, the personal beliefs and values gained from our own cultural upbringing. All of these elements, both conscious and unconscious, affect our relationships. It's important to consider our own views when working with families. Although we often are told to put aside our feelings in our work, the reality is that we bring our own beliefs and values into everything we do. Rather than put them aside, we can increase our awareness so we are more effective in our relationships with families. When we reflect on our interactions with families, we can make decisions about what we say and do to promote positive family and child outcomes. Each decision we make with families makes a difference in the success of our partnerships and in the positive impact we can have.	• Be aware of your own biases, judgments, and negative assumptions. • Identify how these biases, judgments, and assumptions may affect your interactions with families. • Choose to approach families by holding aside these biases, judgments, and assumptions. Adopt one of the strength-based attitudes to guide you. • Identify common perspectives and work together to understand differences. • Ask for help from co-workers and supervisors if you need help doing things differently. • Make time to reflect on your perspective and how it is affecting your work and your attitudes towards families. • Before sharing your views with a family, ask the family to share their perspective first. Share your own when it can help you both come to a common understanding.

Examples
"His family doesn't want to work with us to improve his letter recognition. They always say it's our job to teach him and they don't have time to do extra at home. If they just worked with us, he would improve more quickly. They want him to read by the time he is 4 and that's just unrealistic, especially when they won't reinforce the skills at home. I'm sure in our next meeting they'll blame me that he is not further along with his letters. I want to partner with them and I'm angry they won't work with us. Can you help me think about how to approach this?" "I'm so frustrated with this family. They tell me all the time they are going to follow through on the referrals I give them and then they always have excuses – the kids were sick, ran out of time, I left a message and they never called me back. I feel like it's a waste of time to be working with them and I'm spinning my wheels. They say they need the resources but then they don't do their part. I don't understand what they want from me." "David had a really hard drop-off again this morning. If his mom would just get here earlier and read with them like I suggested, the transition wouldn't be so hard. She is always running late, and it just makes it harder for him and for us. I don't know what to do."
Your Reflections
Reflect on a time when you used this practice with a family. What did you say or do? *Reflect on time when this practice would have helped you build a relationship with a family. What would you have said or done?*

POSITIVE GOAL-ORIENTED RELATIONSHIPS

Strength-Based Attitudes for Building Positive, Goal-Oriented Relationships

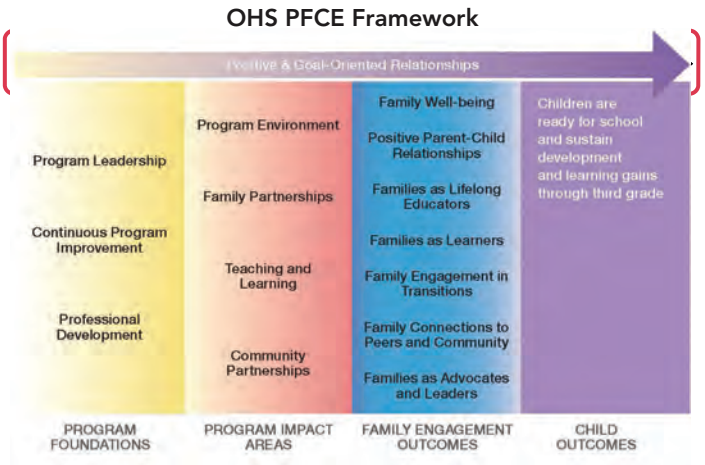
- Families are the first and most important teachers of their children.
- Families are our partners with a critical role in their family's development.
- Families have expertise about their child and their family.
- Families' contributions are important and valuable.

Relationship-Based Practices for Family Engagement

- Observe and Describe the Child's Behavior to Open Communication with the Family
- Reflect on the Family's Perspective
- Support Competence
- Focus on the Family-Child Relationship
- Value a Family's Passion
- Reflect on Your Own Perspective

The OHS PFCE Framework is a research-based approach to program change that shows how HS/EHS programs can promote family engagement and children's learning and development.

Positive Goal-Oriented Relationships are the foundation of successful partnerships with families. These partnerships lead to better outcomes for families and children.



3. REFLECTIVE STRATEGIES

Sustaining Effective Practice

One key to building relationships is taking the time to reflect on our work with families. When we look at what's working and what's not, we can make changes that strengthen our relationships with families. Individual and shared reflective practice helps us work more effectively with families and contribute to better outcomes for children and families.

Reflective Practice

Taking the time to reflect—to stop and think about what has happened, what is happening, and what should happen next—is essential to creating and maintaining Positive Goal-Oriented Relationships.

Reflection on our work with families allows professionals to:

- Understand how our own experiences and beliefs influence our work
- Sharpen our observation and communication skills with children and families
- Improve our skills in building mutually respectful partnerships with families
- Enhance our ability to communicate and build relationships with peers and community partners

Self-Reflection

Reflection is an important part of our own continuous improvement process to understand why and how we make the choices we do. Taking the time to look at yourself and your work gives you the opportunity to acknowledge strengths and challenges, and to improve your skills. In this section, we will explore reflective practice strategies to support our work to build relationships with families.

- **Observe and remember what happens with children, families, and staff.**
  Record children's progress, staff-parent contacts, and information shared between staff. This is an opportunity for staff to understand what does and does not work. Remembering and reflecting on our observations is useful for improving what we do. Recording our reflections in a confidential notebook can be a valuable learning activity.

- **Think about how your own experiences affect you and your work.**
  This may be the most difficult part of self-reflection. We often take actions with children and families because they are familiar and comfortable for us. It can be difficult to question what we already know and think is right. Through self-reflection, we allow ourselves to understand our personal reaction (how a professional situation makes us feel) and our professional action (how we choose to respond professionally in action and words) as two separate things. Because caring for children and families is so important, and at times very emotional, we need to be aware of how our personal perspectives

influence our work. This strategy is aligned with the relationship-based practice of *"reflect on your own perspective."*

- **Think about the perspectives of others.**
  Take the time to wonder about how others' individual experiences may influence how they behave or respond in certain circumstances. However, keep in mind that sometimes wondering about others can be similar to making assumptions about them. We tend to rely on what we have learned and experienced in past circumstances. Taking this in to account, it is important to allow enough space in your reflections and interactions to acknowledge that you don't know what may be motivating someone to think or act in a certain way. When there are opportunities to respectfully communicate about these circumstances with others, it can open us up to a greater understanding of others and ultimately, of ourselves. Reflecting on others' perspectives helps us make better sense of where they are coming from and therefore what strategies might be most effective for engaging them. This strategy is aligned with the relationship-based practice of "reflect on the family's perspective."

- **Identify stressors.**
  Working with children and families is a highly demanding profession. When working with families facing poverty, community violence, social spending cuts, and a shortage of jobs and affordable housing, there may be an even higher level of stress and an increased risk of professional "burnout." A unique aspect of Head Start and Early Head Start is that many professionals are also parents in the communities they serve. Staff may feel the stress both from both their own experiences in the community and as a professional working with others in that community. Being able to name the individual stressors and talk about them with other professionals can help. Programs can create opportunities for staff to get the support they need and help them feel valued for the work they do every day. Staff may want to reflect individually in a journal or meet with colleagues and supervisors. Leadership can prioritize regular times for individual, paired, or group reflection. Promoting self-care among staff can have a positive effect on their skill and productivity.

Reflective Supervision

Just as Head Start and Early Head Start staff strive to engage parents and families in healthy, trusting, and respectful relationships, it is important that staff have the same kind of relationships with colleagues and supervisors. Supervision is not only about staff accountability. It also involves the commitment to nurture and guide staff so that they have the tools to engage children and families successfully. Effective relationships between supervisors and staff contribute to the ability to reflect upon and cope with the stresses and demands of their work. It is an important aspect of building a safe and healthy climate for Head Start and Early Head Start staff, families, and children. Structured supervision maintains staff productivity and reinforces the goal of caregiving within the program.

Supervision is more than a program requirement. Like the relationship between a Head Start and Early Head Start professional and a family, the supervisory relationship can offer the same qualities of mutual care and respect, as well as opportunities for safety, trust, and positive change. Supervision is an opportunity for leadership to use the strategies of reflection to foster growth, reinforce strengths, and encourage resilience. In addition to giving staff the encouragement and guidance they need, it also keeps leadership in touch with the real issues that the program faces.

Structured supervision communicates that there will be times when staff may not know what to do, but that there is someone—and a time and place— dedicated to helping them express their feelings, problem solve, and strategize. If supervision is a place where staff feel judged or evaluated, then the opportunity for reflection and discussion is lost, and meaningful growth is compromised. Confidentiality is essential. It's important for supervisors to help staff feel safe enough to take risks within the relationship. An effective strategy for establishing safety is using messages like those we use with our families. For example, messages such as *"You have strengths," "Reflect on what you need,"* and *"Take care of yourself"* can build resilience among staff and let them know that they are valued partners in the program.

As the supervisory relationship develops over time, supervisors and staff can share the responsibility for the quality and content of the relationship. How does the relationship feel? How is the time used? What topics require more attention? Shared responsibility begins with scheduling regular time for supervision. Preserving this time to build teamwork and brainstorm about how to develop the work is a true gift and should be valued.

Supervisor Strategies: Modeling Positive Goal-Oriented Relationships

When we provide supervision, we also have the opportunity to model effective strategies to build relationships with families. It is a parallel process. How we behave with staff models how we want staff to interact with families. The strength-based attitudes and relationship-based practices for working with families can be adapted to build relationships with our staff.

Strength-based Attitudes:

- Staff deserve the same support and respect we are asking them to give families.
- Staff are our partners with a critical role in achieving outcomes.
- Staff have expertise about their own fields of practice.
- Staff's contributions are valuable and important.

Relationship-based Practices:

1. **Reflect on staff's perspective**
   Have an ongoing dialogue with your staff that allows them to have input about the structure, content, process, timing, and tone of supervision. This offers an opportunity for staff to reflect on what type of supervisory relationship they would like to have and how

to negotiate goals and needs together. Ask staff to consider with you how you can work together to respond to complex situations. This can provide staff with an opportunity to consider different viewpoints within a system and reinforce teamwork.

2. **Support staff's competence**
   Accentuate the positives among staff members and in the work that they do. Staff need to be reassured about their knowledge and expertise. A non-"top down" approach to supervision helps staff feel that they are a valuable member of a team. Staff may feel encouraged to reflect on their own professional competencies and goals, recognize their contributions, and feel safe to explore their challenges.

3. **Focus on the family-staff relationship**
   As you provide guidance to staff, you can work with them to learn new skills for working with families. Use strategies that focus the conversation on taking apart what's working and what's not, and how they can use that information to determine next steps with the family.

4. **Value the staff's passion**
   Try to listen to what the staff is experiencing without judging. This may may include how different situations affect their mood, concentration, motivation, ability to connect with others, and the demands on you). What are their emotional reactions to what they experience? By creating a safe and professional space where staff can talk about their real emotions, you help each other to better understand the roots of problems and strategize about how to address them.

5. **Make time for your own reflection**
   As a supervisor, you often put your staff's needs before your own. Reflection allows us to consider our reactions, responses, and options. Make time to reflect on your own experiences, goals, and challenges. Reflection on a past situation can help us prepare for similar events in the future. This is emotional work, and self-care is essential for you and staff. When you become available to staff in more emotional ways, you will need to take time for yourself to rejuvenate, reflect, and focus on your own professional development. Explore what helps you feel refreshed and inspired to learn and grow. What role can your supervisor play in your growth? How can your supervisor give you the best chance at success?

One of the joys of working with families of young children is that it is an opportunity for everyone's growth: the child, the parent, and the Head Start and Early Head Start staff and supervisors. Reflective supervision is a primary way in which programs can attend to the growth of staff. The shared experience of supervisor and staff assures that no one is alone in doing this very important work. Just as staff feel that their work is meaningful when families grow, so too do supervisors find satisfaction in knowing that staff are expanding their skills and finding meaning in their work.

POSITIVE GOAL-ORIENTED RELATIONSHIPS

Reflective Practice

A key to building positive, goal-oriented relationships is taking the time to reflect on our work with families. When we look at what's working and what's not, we can make changes that strengthen our relationships with families. Self-reflection is also an important part of our own professional growth.

Strategies for Effective Self-Reflection

- Observe and remember what happens with children, families, and staff.
- Think about how your own experiences affect you and your work.
- Think about the perspective of others.
- Identify stressors.

Reflective Supervision

It is also essential for staff to have healthy, trusting, and respectful relationships with colleagues and supervisors. Reflective supervision helps to nurture and guide staff so that they have the tools to engage children and families successfully.

Strengths-based Attitudes for Supervision

- Staff deserve the support and respect we are asking them to give families.
- Staff are our partners with a critical role in achieving outcomes.
- Staff have expertise about their own fields of practice.
- Staff contributions are valuable and important.

Strategies for Effective Reflective Supervision

- Reflect on the staff's perspective.
- Support the staff's competence.
- Focus on the family-staff relationship.
- Value the staff's passion.
- Make time for your own reflection.

4. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Additional OHS NCPFCE Resources on Positive Goal-Oriented Relationships

Best Practices in Family and Community Engagement Video Series
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/center/video-series.html

National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family

Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/center/framework/interactive.html

PFCE Simulation—Boosting School Readiness through Effective Family Engagement
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/center/pfce_simulation

Relationship-Based Competencies
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/center/foundations/ohs-rbc.pdf

Relationship-Based Practice
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/center/relationship/practice.html

Understanding Family Engagement Outcomes: Research to Practice Series
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/center/rtp-series.html

Related OHS Resources

Cultural Backgrounders (Bhutanese Refugee Families, Refugees from Burma, and Refugee Families from Iraq)
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/center/refugee-families.html

Family Connections Materials: A Comprehensive Approach in Dealing with Parental Depression and Related Adversities
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/health/center/mental-health/adult-mental-health/FamilyConnection.html

News You Can Use: A Circle of Support for Infants and Toddlers - Reflective Practices and Strategies in Early Head Start
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/ehsnrc/comp/program-design/NewsYouCanUse.htm

OHS Professional Development: Foundations for Staff Development
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/pd/fsd/staff.html

Raising Young Children in a New Country: Supporting Early Learning and Healthy Development
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/docs/raising-young-children-in-a-new-country-bryc5.pdf

Revisiting and Updating the Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs Serving Children Ages Birth to Five
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/hs/resources/ECLKC_Bookstore/PDFs/Revisiting%20Multicultural%20Principles%20for%20Head%20Start_English.pdf